

NOTE: This is a preliminary draft based on previous policy statements by the Board and updated only slightly to reflect current legislative issues. It was assembled by staff for discussion purposes only. It does not represent the policies or opinions of the current Board, its individual members, or the Board's staff.

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Washington State Board of Health

STATEMENT OF POLICY ON POSSIBLE 2005 LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

It is the policy of the Washington State Board of Health (Policy 01-001) to monitor and comment on issues before the Legislature that either alter the Board's statutory authority, run counter to a policy direction the Board has established in rule, or directly relate to one of the Priority Topics established by the Board. In addition, the Board thought it prudent to discuss some of the major issues likely to appear on the Legislature's agenda and to reach agreement on the sense of the Board prior to session. This document represents the sense of the Board on a limited number of significant issues that the Board discussed as a whole prior to session, and is intended to guide Board staff and individual Board members in their communications.

This is neither an exhaustive nor a prescriptive list of issues that Board staff will monitor or individual Board members may comment on under Board policy. Board staff, as always, will review and monitor an extensive list of proposed legislation. There are many subjects that the Legislature might take up that the Board may choose to comment on because a bill affects the Board's authority, rules, or priorities projects.

The following statements represent the sense of the Board:

- **Access to Health Care:** The Board recognizes that the state's budget difficulties make health care cuts difficult to avoid, but is discouraged and dismayed by the degree to which those cuts have decreased access to critical health services in recent years. It is particularly concerned about protecting access for children. The Board continues to support an evidence- and population-based approach—such as the Board's "Menu of Critical Health Services"—to the design of safety net programs and benefits packages. This approach would first emphasize stable and adequate funding for public health infrastructure. In terms of personal medical care it would emphasize primary and preventive care, as well as disease management for chronic conditions, and it would give equal weight to evidence supporting the benefits of programs that are now excluded or face elimination—namely dental, substance abuse, and behavioral services. The Board believes stable funding is necessary to achieve universal access to such a core set of services, and that achieving stable funding would require: broad-based agreement on the menu of core services; prioritization of those services; establishment and tracking of measurable outcomes; and reformation of basic financing mechanisms.
- **Children's Preventive Services:** The Board encourages state policy makers to maintain the highest priority on promoting delivery of children's clinical preventive services. This is consistent with past Board work and the *2004 State Health Report*. The Board supports maintaining publicly funded coverage for low-income children as a necessary to ensuring access to clinical preventive services (though coverage is not sufficient by itself). It does not support cost-sharing requirements

or administrative barriers that would discourage participation in public programs that insure low-income children. Instead, the state should be proactively encouraging enrollment and eliminating disincentives. The Board urges policy makers to pursue a range of incentives, including financial incentives for parents, to assure that all Washington's children receive proven clinical preventive health services.

- **Public Health Funding:** The Washington State Board of Health supports the establishment of a stable and secure funding source for public health that would be adequate to enable local health jurisdictions, the Department of Health, and the State Board of Health to meet the standards contained developed by Public Health Improvement Partnership as required under RCW 43.70 (notably sections -520, -550, and -580).
- **Mandated Benefits:** The Board believes the state has an interest in encouraging access to and utilization of proven preventive practices. One of the best ways to ensure such services are provided, promoted and utilized is to include them in benefits packages. While it is important to reduce the cost of health insurance, removing coverage for proven preventive practices will have only limited impact on short-term insurance costs, and is likely to impose significant long-term health and social costs on individuals, the state, and society.
- **Mental Health:** The Board has heard from several local jurisdictions that the lack of adequate community resources needed to address behavioral problems and mental illness is a major public health problem. The work of advocacy groups, the Joint Legislative, Executive on Mental Health Services and Financing, and other entities suggests that mental health services are inadequate across most of the state, and that Washington's mental health safety net is wholly inadequate to deal with current needs. Mental health issues that go unaddressed place huge demands on the health care delivery system, public health, and the criminal justice system. The Board also recognizes that mental illnesses are as real, as consequential, and as deserving of treatment as physical illnesses. The Board therefore supports efforts to achieve "mental health parity" and to increase support to community mental health programs.
- **School Health:** The Board supports using science and public health best practice models to improve physical activity and nutrition policies and health practices in schools. It also supports programs that would improve children's access to comprehensive primary and preventive services, either through school-based care or referrals to other providers.
- **Oral Health:** The Board is concerned about the poor levels of access to children's oral health care, and encourages the state to explore solutions that include maintaining Medicaid and SCHIP dental coverage to the degree possible and expanding the use of fluoridation as a population-based approach to preventing dental caries in people with limited access to oral health care.
- **Food Code:** The Board has adopted a statewide, consistent Food Code based on the U.S. FDA Food Code. The federal code is based on the best available science and the Board sees value in both nationwide and statewide consistency. There may be a few instances, however, where local jurisdictions must deviate from the state code to respond to local circumstances, and the Board would oppose legislation eliminating all local discretion.
- **Tobacco:** The Board supports full implementation of the Department of Health *Tobacco Prevention and Control Plan* and would discourage any actions, such as further Tobacco Settlement securitization, that would undermine these proven successful efforts. The Board supports any and all efforts to require smoke-free public places.

- **Genetics and Privacy:** The Board will support the components of legislation that are consistent with the recommendations of the Genetics Task Force.
- **Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxins:** The Board supports the goals and intent of Department of Ecology's "*Proposed Strategy to Continually Reduce Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxins (PBTs) in Washington State.*" It has also supported the Mercury Action Plan. It would support development and implementation of an action plan for polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE) and would endorse a ban on forms of PBDE that can be shown to be harmful to human health.
- **On-Site Sewage:** The Board is currently reviewing rules governing on-site sewage systems. A rule development committee for smaller on-site systems recently finished working on rule revision recommendations and the DOH is working a final rule draft that will go to the Board in March. In October, the Board adopted Resolution 04-04, which relates to operation and maintenance of septic systems along marine shorelines. The Board would support legislative efforts consistent with the intent of this resolution.
- **Regulatory Reform:** The Board supports efforts to create less burdensome and less intrusive models of state regulation, but only so long as those models do not deny vulnerable citizens the protection of the state.